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ABSTRACT

More than 230 educators from 125 schools and communities around the country gathered for the national conference of the Foundation for Excellent Schools to exchange ideas and strategies for educational improvement. The conference theme, "Achieving Educational Excellence through Collaboration," was featured in sessions exploring the possibilities of partnerships in education. U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, discussed school and community partnerships in education as a growing trend. Other themes that were stressed in panel sessions and in individual presentations were: (1) team building and leadership as the building blocks of change; (2) the power of partnerships; (3) parents as partners; (4) the collegiate connection; (5) bringing businesses on board; (6) promoting community ties; (7) reaching out and up through service learning and peer relationships; (8) finding funding; and (9) connecting through creativity. Experiences in an Oregon school district and the exchange of experiences among New York City, Alabama, Massachusetts, and Vermont teachers are also described. (SLD)

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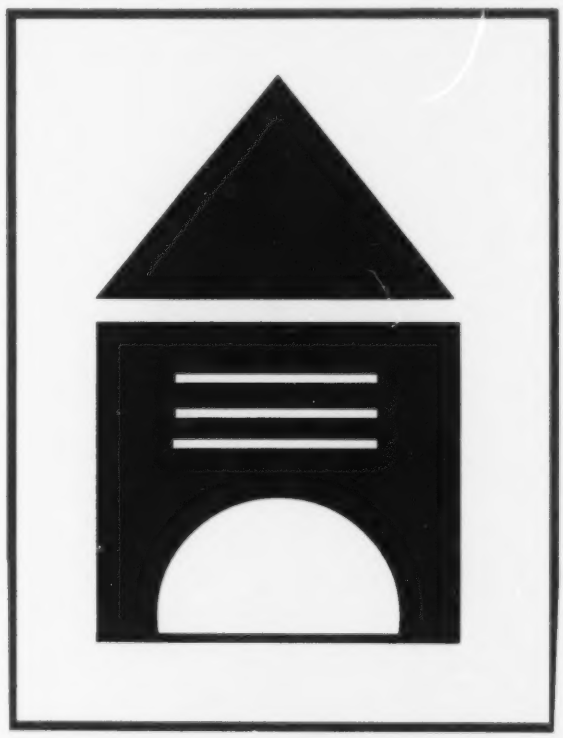
ED 427 126

Achieving Educational Excellence Through Collaboration

National Conference Report



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Herbert F. Dalton
FES

Foundation for Excellent Schools

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November 6–7, 1998
Stowe, Vermont

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Achieving Educational Excellence Through Collaboration

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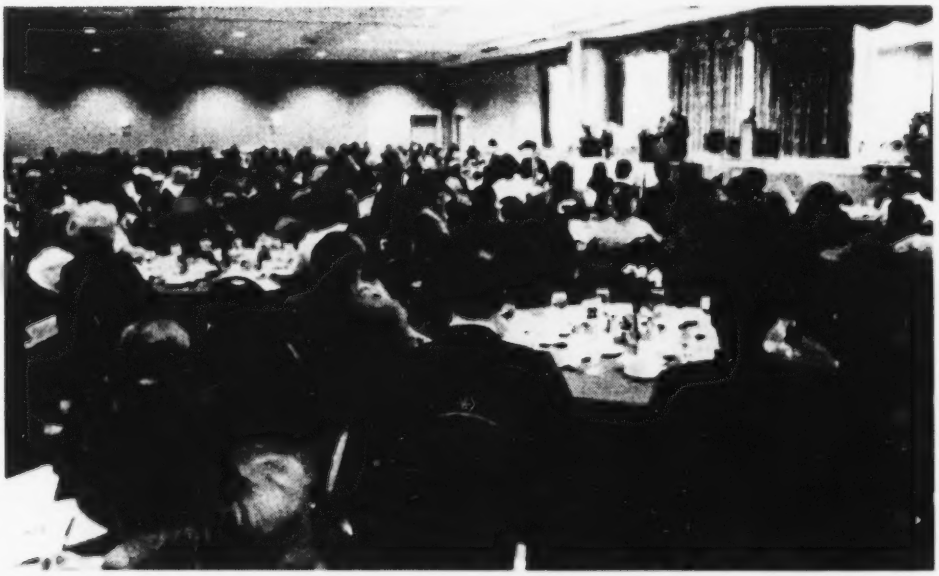


It worked.

I knew we had achieved our conference goal when John McDonald, principal of New York's Ticonderoga Middle School, wrote, "Our team is reenergized and recommitted after the national conference, and looking forward to what lies ahead. We are ready to share our enthusiasm and good ideas with other *Dream Makers* in our district."

Vermont Governor Howard Dean shakes hands with Rick Dalton, FES President.

John's impressions echoed those of nearly a hundred other *Dream Makers* who have written, e-mailed, or called the FES office to say that their participation in the conference was helping them take one more step. As you'll see in this report, the conference was both a celebration and an affirmation for the 320 of us from 125 schools and communities around the country. But the greatest benefit of the conference was never meant to be the conference itself. Instead, it is what happens afterward — the impact our sharing, recommitment, and reenergizing cannot fail to make a difference to America's young people.

This report, on the 1998 FES conference "Achieving Educational Excellence Through Collaboration," tries to capture our experience over those two chilly days in November. The conference itself was great. A report, however, cannot reflect the soul of an event. It cannot fully describe the communion among peers, old friends, and new colleagues. A report cannot express the excitement we felt in hearing innovative ideas, sharing effective strategies for learning, and teaching each other, and ourselves.

The presence at this year's national conference of such distinguished and committed leaders in education as United States Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, Vermont's U.S. Senator James M. Jeffords, Vermont Governor Howard Dean, Vermont Commissioner of Education Marc Hull, and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Program Officer Marianne Kugler underscored the significance of our work. It also underscored a confidence in the mission and continued growth of Foundation for Excellent Schools nationally. One student at a time, we are helping to transform America's schools together.

Rick Dalton

Rick Dalton, *FES President*

Building Partnerships to Improve Education

United States Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley did more than speak at the conference. He attended sessions, spoke with FES teachers about their views on education — and put forward a few of his own. In the course of his comments, he lauded a number of conference participants, including Marianne Russell Kugler of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and U. S. Senator James M. Jeffords of Vermont. Yet, it was Secretary Riley's commitment to public education and the strengthening of that system through partnership that made a real impact. The abridged text of his speech follows:

I am delighted to join you here in Vermont and to thank my good friend, Senator Jim Jeffords, for his kind words. The people of Vermont should be very proud of his work on your behalf. Senator Jeffords led the effort to pass the Higher Education Act which includes, among other important provisions, a two-part program called "Gear-Up." Gear-Up will match colleges with high-poverty middle school and state-based programs with that same group of students to get young people on track early for a college education. Senator Jeffords also took the lead in passing IDEA and in revising vocational education legislation.

This conference gives me the chance to share ideas with leading education and community leaders such as yourselves and to thank you all for the wonderful work that you do everyday. You never stand taller than when you stoop down to help a child, so I want you to know that you all stand very tall in my eyes.

I am a strong believer in public education, and I think the election results tell us very clearly that a broad American consensus has developed which supports increased investment in education. The American people have sent a very clear message to the Courthouse, to the Statehouse, and to the Congress to tune into what is important — which is education. If you were big in improving public education, whether you were a Democrat, a Republican, or Independent, you were big at the voting booth.

People have come to realize that when your school is growing and improving, so is the community at large. They want smaller classes and modernized schools. They want to make sure that there is a strong and sustained focus on the basics like reading, in addition to making sure that young people are ready for the world of technology. The American people have also made it abundantly clear that they want safer schools and schools that provide pre-K and after-school programs. Children's brains don't shut down at 3 or 3:30 p.m., and neither should their schools. Let's get kids off the streets and out of the arcades and reassure their worrying working parents that they're doing something wholesome.

As I travel around the country, I detect two new trends in education.

The first trend is growing support for the arts. Many more Americans are coming to the conclusion that the arts really do need to be an integral part of any core curriculum. With his long leadership of the Congressional Art Caucus, I know that is a view Senator Jeffords would share.

The second trend is the amazing number of schools that are developing partnerships in their communities. People are once again seeing their public schools as the vital center of their communities. People have come to realize that if the school is growing and improving so is the community at large....

I also believe that creating new partnerships at the community level can go a long way to answering those critics who are hung up on the belief that vouchers are the answer to everything that is wrong with our nation's schools.

It just about makes my blood boil to think about the voucher schemes that some people are proposing that would weaken public education. My friends, if we do nothing else at this conference, let's draw a line in the sand and say, Let's give every American child a great education. Because we believe that all children can learn — and all means all.

One of my goals as the U.S. Secretary of Education has been to challenge the "tyranny of low expectations" that too often leads people to give up on a child and even a school. Too many people — including too many educators — are still stuck on the belief that some young people can learn to high standards and some cannot. I disagree. I know that you do as well. The work of this foundation clearly tells me we share the same vision.

You are proving by your good work that bad schools can become good schools and that mediocre schools can become excellent schools. You are sending a very clear message that expectations matter and that a long-term commitment to excellence makes a profound difference.

This leads me to a central concern when I think about the future of American education — the need for quality teachers. We can talk all we want about high standards, but if we do not have a teaching force that can teach to high standards, then we will not meet our common goal.

This is all the more important given the transition about to take place in our nation's teaching force. Our nation's schools will need to hire 2.2 million teachers in the next ten years. Approximately one-half to two-thirds of those teachers will be first-time teachers. This will have enormous implications in terms of how we recruit these teachers — how we induct them into the profession — and how we improve their skills once they are in the classroom.

We are kidding ourselves if we think we can improve education without changing the present broken-down system of preparing new teachers. That's why I offered a detailed plan two months ago to overhaul the system. Some of my suggestions include:

Don't put just any warm body in front of a class — let's eliminate the practice of emergency licenses. Let's raise teacher salaries by paying teachers for increasing their knowledge and skills. Give basic skills tests to students before they enter teacher education programs. End the practice of teaching out of field — every teacher should have at least a minor in the subject he or she teaches.

Make new teachers feel welcome — we can't afford to lose 22 percent of new teachers in the first three years. Create a national job bank to match teachers with openings. Overhaul the certification process, and put more emphasis on the knowledge and skills of future teachers, however they got them. Create rigorous alternative pathways to teaching which can help recruit mid-career professionals.

Those are just a few of the ideas. The time to modernize America's schools is now, when the economy is good. In the words of that famous phrase, "Let's fix the roof while the sun is shining."

It's time for real change, and let's keep up a dialogue about it. Next January, my department will be releasing our first annual report on teacher quality to highlight this issue....

I never forget that we in the U.S. Department of Education are your junior partners in education. Education is a state responsibility and a local function, but it is also a national priority.

Instilling a love of learning in young people is what you do every day, and this has been the philosophy which has guided our new initiatives. We haven't just "thrown federal money at a problem." We've tried to give you the resources and the opportunities to create exciting new community-school partnerships in your home towns.

I want to end by challenging each of you to lead those partnerships in your community. Ask a businessman to join Gear-Up and mentor a needy youngster. Ask a local music teacher to spend time with students after school. Encourage your local colleges to team up with high-poverty schools to fire up young people's dreams of one day becoming a teacher. Help communities to come together to design their new schools as centers of community.

Above all, continue the good work you are now doing to build new partnerships for excellence in education. You are making a profound difference to the future of all of our children and our great country. To my way of thinking, your continuing efforts to build these partnerships is the very measure and essence of patriotism in our times.

Building a Winning Team

"Team building is tough. Yet we all know that it is essential to moving our schools forward," said David Erdmann, dean of admissions and enrollment at Florida's Rollins College and an FES program director.

A packed room listened and offered insights as Erdmann's panel discussion on "Building a Winning Team on the Academic Playing Field" yielded practical, action-oriented tips.

Bob Harrison, principal of Madison County Middle School in Georgia, talked about merging two schools with two different philosophies: "If you have the ability to choose your team, look for people with strengths *different from your own.* Different opinions can give you direction. Don't look for consensus, look for compromise. Combine ideas. Be flexible."

Becky DiFrancesco, a teacher at Oxbow High School in Vermont, offered this advice: "We're a school that has only learned very recently how to become a good school. You have to know where you're going and where you want to go — like a sports team." DiFrancesco also had suggestions for intra-team conflict: "Recognize how others bring a new perspective. Be open to each other. Enjoy your colleagues."

Denise Richtarik, principal of Tiogue School in Rhode Island, noted that an outside perspective can be a great asset: "FES forced us, as a team, to think outside of the box." Richtarik cited the importance of "disagreeing," but not sabotaging, as well as the need to build trust among team members.

"We need to have kids see that lifelong learning exists."

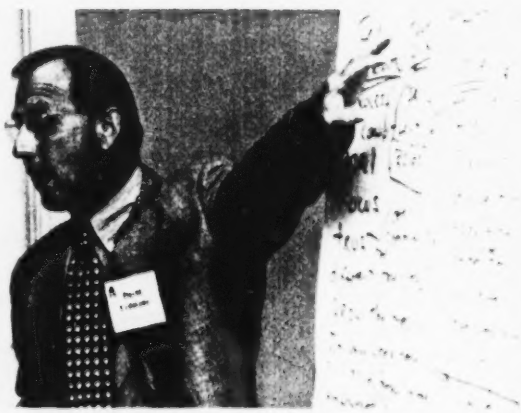
— Vermont Governor Howard Dean
from his opening remarks

Learning the Art of Leadership

James Carter, superintendent of schools in Selma, Alabama; Maurice Horton, superintendent of Dollarway School District in Arkansas; Noreen Hosier, principal of David Ruggles Junior High School 258 in New York City; and Robert Jones, principal of Oxbow High School in Vermont, made these suggestions for strengthening leadership:

1. Communicate your vision; make sure it's clear and keep it out there all of the time.
2. Be persistent. Be willing to spend whatever time or effort is necessary.
3. Care about and respect the people you work with.
4. Be flexible.
5. Be visible and available.
6. Know your own strengths and weaknesses and be able to delegate.
7. Keep learning yourself; look at problems as opportunities for growth.
8. Take risks. Think of what you can gain!

Team building and leadership...the Alpha and Omega of fostering excellence in education through professional development.



David Erdmann paraphrased Indira Gandhi: "Leadership once meant muscles; today it means getting along with people."

The Power of Partnerships

The conference theme — Achieving Educational Excellence Through Collaboration — was featured in the sessions exploring the possibilities of partnerships. Stories of schools working together with parents, colleges, and businesses showed that the road to educational excellence requires cooperation and connection with constituents *outside* the school building.

Marc Hull, Vermont's Commissioner of Education, said, "Schools, parents, colleges, and communities working together instill the power of new possibility and creativity into every endeavor."

Marc Hull

Faces from the Conference

The most important partner in a child's learning is, undoubtedly, the parent or central caregiver. Yet in many homes where both parents or caregivers work, and in single-parent households, parental participation is increasingly difficult to maintain.

Tracie Dye, a teacher at The Renaissance Academy in Georgia; Sue Showalter, a parent at Oxbow High School in Vermont; and Patricia Winsor, a parent at upstate New York's Milford Central School, led an eye-opening discussion on "Getting Parents on Board."

Mariana Leighton, Terry Ehrich, and Marc Hull

Small Steps to Big Change

Dye began by asserting the need for schools to change basic attitudes when dealing with parents: "There should be conferences for positive reasons, not just for negative issues." At Macon's Ballard Hudson Middle School, parents no longer have to search kids' backpacks for report cards. Instead, Macon schools ask parents to come in and pick up report cards, and enjoy a spaghetti dinner at the school. At Miller Middle School, also in Macon, more than 1,000 parents — representing 80 percent of the student body — come to pick up their child's report card.

The importance of keeping parents informed and involved is a priority in many FES schools. Selma Middle School in Alabama sends monthly newsletters to parents. At Port St. Joe High School in Florida, callers to the school hear a four-minute recorded newsbrief of school activities when they are put on hold. Tiogue School in Rhode Island involved 100 percent of their students' families in community service projects the last two years.

Parents who don't have fond memories of their own school days are often threatened by the thought of "going back to school." Yet, there are many small ways that schools can make these parents feel more comfortable.

For parents who have difficulty coming to school events because they can't arrange for child care, Margaret Boylan, English teacher at Toll Gate High School in Rhode Island, offered this solution: "Do daycare in the next room and get students to organize activities for the siblings. This is a good learning experience for the students and a great help to the parents."

One nationwide effort to increase parental presence is Terry Ehrich's First Day Foundation. The Foundation is working to make the first day of school a holiday so that parents can attend classes with their children. According to Ehrich, "The goal is to get parents involved from day one as partners in their children's education, and to give them hints and tips on simple ways they can help their children do well in school."

When parents go back to school, they become active participants in the education process, not just spectators.

The Collegiate Connection

Kyle Dodson with St. Michael's student Brian Schmidt.

Noreen Hosier

College can be an intimidating prospect for both prospective students and their parents. Kyle Dodson, director of the Academic Internship Program at St. Michael's College in Vermont and director of FES's One More Step program (which links at-risk students from eight Vermont schools with college student mentors from eight colleges); Noreen Hosier, principal of David Ruggles Junior High School 258 in New York City; and Bud Meyers, chair of the University of Vermont's Department of Education, suggested ways to open up discussion among colleges, students, and parents.

School-college partnerships help raise motivations and aspirations.

Kyle Dodson gave tips on establishing a partnership. One More Step mentors receive training from experts in communication, adolescent development, and other relevant areas. Sharon James, a teacher at Winooski Middle/High School, commented on the program's success: "Many of our kids are scared to death to even think about college. It's so remote. The One More Step program eliminates fear of the unknown and bridges the gap between school and the great beyond."

Dodson did not sidestep the difficulties of building partnerships. Mentors must be chosen carefully and "a commitment to the partnership is crucial for all participants." He also acknowledged that scheduling between schools and colleges can be challenging, but suggested using technology to solve the problem.

Despite some obstacles, the results are worthwhile. Becky DiFrancesco of Oxbow High School in Vermont, said that after the program began, kids came up to her in the hall asking, "When will our mentors be coming?" "When will we see our college students again?" They see "there is a lot of friendship and college actually looks like fun." Families who had simply assumed college wasn't an option are now taking a second look.

Partnerships merge two worlds.

While high school and college environments are certainly different, these differences can seem like chasms when the high school is in New York City and the college (in this case, a university) is in Vermont. FES schools, however, are known for their willingness to take up this particular challenge. Noreen Hosier's David Ruggles Junior High is no exception.

FES established a partnership that allows UVM students to teach at David Ruggles: "This partnership has merged two worlds. There are cultural differences, but also commonalities, among all adolescents," said Hosier.

Bud Meyers commented on the need for his students to have a broader and more diverse experience than what they know in Vermont: "Our students need a better understanding of the world."

Bud Meyers

Hosier noted that the program has helped her students see the future impact of their actions. When asked how she brought together people from such different communities and had them really understand each others' lives, Hosier stressed that issues like culture shock are to be expected in this type of partnership.

To raise funds for partnerships, Hosier suggested starting off small. "Money is a challenge," she said, "but FES can help you find grants and other sources of funding."

The annual ski trip/college visit rewards students at Ruggles and other FES New York City schools who have made measurable improvement throughout the school year. Accompanied by FES on-site director for New York City James Thompson, teachers, parents, and students spend time skiing and snowboarding at Okemo Mountain Resort. Okemo provides lift passes, lessons, equipment, and lunch for the students. From Okemo, the group travels to Middlebury College where they meet with students and faculty and tour the campus. College students offer insights about life on campus; faculty talk about the college acceptance process, coursework, and career possibilities; admissions staff help parents and students realize that funding is available for those who seriously pursue post-secondary education, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Kenney Robinson, a social studies teacher at Roberto Clemente Intermediate School 195 in Harlem who took part in last year's trip, said that even this brief visit to Middlebury was an important breakthrough. "They [the New York City students] are now looking at college as a choice," Robinson said. "A lot of times, students don't think about college until it is too late. Peer pressure makes them think the other way, about not achieving. This trip turns that light bulb on — if college is in their future, they have to start the preparation now."

One of his students, Darryl Alexander, agreed. "It tempts you to go to college," said the eighth grader. Now his dream is to become a pediatrician.

Other FES schools have also formed school-college partnerships. Teaming up with Colgate University, Milford Central School in central New York sponsored a bus trip for fourth and eighth graders and their parents to the campus for a Saturday program including tours, talks, and a football game. "Many parents had never been to a college campus," said former principal Gary Turits, "and the end result was great conversations about what their child would have to do in school to be prepared for admission to a university like Colgate."

John McCardell, president of Middlebury College, offered additional insights: "Colleges can provide wonderful experiences for younger students. By showing them what's available here and by introducing them to the college environment when they are young, much of the apprehension students might feel is avoided. In addition, visiting a college gives you something to aim for."

Opening the lines of communication early in the process is key to reducing higher education anxiety.

John McCardell

Bringing Businesses On Board

From major corporate players to local businesses, this real-world connection can create meaningful payoffs for both partners.

Cynthia Fowlkes

Ira Weston

"When schools aren't in sync with the economy, you could be educating kids for an economy that doesn't exist," said Michael Kane of Mt. Auburn Associates, a community planning firm in Massachusetts. "Both schools and businesses need to think about what's in it for them," Kane said. "Schools can't approach the partnership as a short-term, charity relationship, and businesses can't just allow schools to take the money and leave."

Kane was joined on the business partnership panel by Cynthia Fowlkes, coordinator of the Academy of Finance at Paul Robeson High School in New York City; Robert Morse, director of the Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center in Vermont; and Pete Richards, director of the school-to-work program at Oxbow High School. The panel gave some insightful advice to schools looking for business partnerships.

Needs assessment is an all-important first step.

Sending a questionnaire to the business community is one way to determine its needs, according to Bob Morse. He suggested drawing businesses slowly into a discussion and an exchange, and then to build a coalition.

Cynthia Fowlkes cited the reasons that the collaboration between Paul Robeson High and Salomon Brothers flourishes: "Salomon Brothers was able to meet our needs and wants. There was a commitment by both parties to make this work. We were able to work together on the programs and we emphasized sharing. Salomon managers come into the schools and our teachers go to Salomon to take computer classes."

Fowlkes also emphasized the importance of having everyone in the community involved. Teachers, guidance counselors, community leaders, and students are all on the steering committee for the partnership.

You profit from perseverance.

Initial meetings between Robeson and Salomon were not perfect. Robeson principal Ira Weston was quick to note: "At the first meeting, the educators were on one side of the table and the business people on the other. The corporation had the impression that they were adopting our school. They wanted to impose their corporate goals on us."

Weston offered these tips based on his experience in developing a partnership between his school and Salomon Brothers: "Think about what your school can offer businesses. You have to sell your school as a resource to that business. We provide cheap labor and we create future employees. Three of our students are currently employed at Salomon Brothers. Also, you need to think about what bang businesses are getting for their buck. Focus the business on achievable programs in the school that can be backed by data that they can show to the shareholders.

Building partnerships is all work... and some play.

"Know the names of the employees in the businesses you are going after. Plan games and events. At Salomon, they have an 80-hour work week. So we organized an outlet for them — a basketball game at our school."

One teacher asked how to forge business partnerships in rural communities where corporations are a rarity. Bob Morse suggested looking toward groups of small businesses like the local Rotary or Chamber of Commerce.

Ira Weston gave one more tip on how to reach excellence through collaboration: "FES can help you set up a partnership. They helped us set up a partnership with Skidmore College, and Skidmore helped us get Salomon Brothers. In addition, our relationship with FES gave us time to plan the partnership. They contributed to our success and sustainability."

FES board co-chair Mariana Leighton introduces John McCardell, president of Middlebury College; Terry Ehrich, president of First Day Foundation; and Vermont Commissioner of Education Marc Hull.

Breakout session

A Five-Step Strategy

Aura Rivera, principal of Roberto Clemente Intermediate School 195 in New York City, and Carole Harman, art department chair, and Jeffrey Kenyon, head of guidance, both at Central High School in Rhode Island, teamed up to share these strategies to strengthen communication with and support from the community:

1. Start small and start from within.
2. Develop newsletters for parents to keep them updated.
3. Invite not only parents but local businesses to school events.
4. Use teachers, parents, and current and former students for public relations.
5. Contact local newspapers about school news and events.

Service learning combines direct experience with a chance to improve the lives of others. The result often answers the elusive question, "Why are we learning?"

"Students engaged in service learning develop citizenship skills and social responsibility by thoughtful action to help a community. They apply academic skills and knowledge to real-world situations. In the process, they build confidence and self-esteem," said Sheila Bailey, service learning consultant at the Vermont Department of Education.

What is service learning?

Service learning provides opportunities for students to plan, visualize, analyze, and interact directly with their community. By tying these experiences into classroom curricula, service learning provides an innovative forum for both the students and the community to grow.

One hundred percent of the families at Tiogue School in Rhode Island participated in a town-beautification project last year. Community organizations demonstrated their support of the project through in-kind contributions of products and services: local businesses donated flowers, shrubs, and seeds that were delivered to the site by the National Guard; a local transportation company bused students to the site; and firefighters from the town's fire department watered the freshly planted flowers. The regional TV news station and other local press were on hand to cover the event. "The visibility of our students in the community improved the community's perception of the school," said Tiogue teacher Barbara Werchadlo.

Peers prepare incoming students in a model program.

In New York's Harlem, A. Philip Randolph Campus High School launched a community service project to create an educational community that is being recognized as a national model. One initiative has high school students serving as peer tutors in schools that feed into Randolph, helping at-risk students with academic and social skills. Assistant principal Irene Gee says, "We wanted to give our students more opportunities to make relevant contributions. We also wanted to address problems encountered by incoming freshmen by linking older kids with the younger kids who were most at risk. This bond mitigates some of the pressure and stress these kids feel when they enter high school."

Teachers and guidance counselors at neighboring Roberto Clemente Intermediate School 195 noted higher aspirations, increased self-esteem, and improved attendance (up 100 percent) among students participating in the mentoring program. "Students matured and gained self-confidence," said Aura Rivera, principal of Roberto Clemente.

In addition to its thriving partnership with Clemente, Randolph's community service project has doubled the number of students volunteering in elementary schools, nursing homes, and other community organizations.

Mary Chin shares copies of the Recycle Game with participants during the Browse & Brag.

Service learning brings multiple benefits.

A panel discussion on service learning led by Sheila Bailey, with Frederick Bay, executive director of the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation; Irene Gee, assistant principal at A. Philip Randolph Campus High School; and Margaret Maclean, principal at Peacham Elementary School in Vermont, noted that service learning:

- Catalyzes students to achieve specific academic goals and objectives
- Fulfills unmet needs in a community through direct service that is meaningful and necessary
- Enhances students' self-esteem and self-confidence by showing them how they can make a difference
- Fosters development of empathy, personal values, beliefs, awareness, and social responsibility
- Encourages student learning by joining theory with experience and thought with action
- Provides structured time for students to reflect on the service and the learning
- Exposes students to societal inadequacies and empowers them to change things
- Develops an environment of participation and civic responsibility
- Provides a foundation to examine ourselves, our society, and our future

Flexibility is key to success in busy communities.

Kugler described one school where a service-learning after-school program began. Despite the fact that students had praised the program, hardly anyone showed up. When students were asked why, they explained that they had to baby-sit after school and, therefore, were unable to attend. The school quickly resolved this dilemma by adding a child-care component to the program.

Stories like these are becoming more common, and Kugler wants to insure that these successes continue to grow. From the City of Boston to the State of California to a small community in Utah, communities, governments, and private groups are making things happen through a dynamic series of new partnerships....it is a revolution whose time has come.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

Marianne Kugler, program officer for education at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, presented the attributes of one of the most innovative ideas in the recent history of education — 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

The idea of the schoolhouse as a nexus — for students, their families, and other community members — is not new. In the past, schoolhouses were used as meeting places for a variety of civic and religious groups. Today, Kugler and the Mott Foundation's 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program are looking for a return to schools as a resource for the entire community. Kugler is taking a lead position in the ground-breaking, public-private partnership that has linked the Mott Foundation with the U.S. Department of Education.

"Now is a new time, and it requires new actions," she stated. "We are part of a revolution — you and I. But this is a revolution where the public will and the communities are ahead of us, not behind us."

What is driving this revolution? Kugler says the first indication is that citizens do not want to give up on public education. "They are disappointed with it some of the time, they do not feel we have high enough expectations, but they do not want to give up on public education....and they see this as an opportunity to improve an institution that they still have faith in."

Marianne Kugler

Finding the Funding

Marianne Kugler

With so many program possibilities and so much excitement, educators are often left with one question — "Where will the money come from?" Christine Graham, a professional grant-writer; Frederick Bay, executive director of the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation; Marianne Kugler, program officer at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; and J. Bart Morrison, assistant executive director of The Clark Foundation, provided advice on how to obtain grants and keep them coming.

Christine Graham

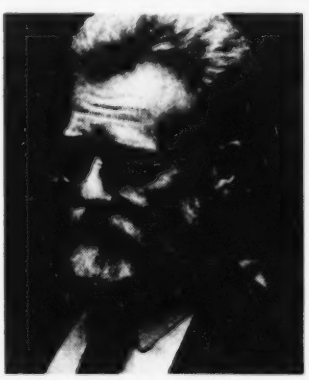
1. **Follow the instructions.**
   Proposals that veer from the requested format are rarely successful. Use all of the headings required; present all of the information asked for. Your job here is not to edit your writing for redundancy (saying to yourself, "Why are they asking for that? I just explained it!"); your job is to make it as easy as possible for the people reviewing your proposal.

2. **Give your proposed program a "twist" to make it stand out from others.**
   For example, if you are requesting money for a computer lab, include a program to open up the lab to the community after school with student mentors present. If you are trying to raise money for an after-school program, include something innovative that serves another community need (e.g., teens teaming up with senior citizens to write a local history).

3. **Ask for help.**
   When you call a foundation, talk to the person on the other end of the phone; ask for advice. Often you can get valuable insights on what a foundation is "looking for," and sometimes an on-site promoter of your program!

4. **Include letters from partnering groups/businesses.**
   Speak with those in your community who will be teaming up with you to run the program. Ask them to write a letter expressing their commitment. Give them specific guidelines and a deadline.

5. **Stay in touch with funders.**
   Many grantees seem to disappear after they receive their grant. You will increase your chances for further funding, as well as demonstrate how the money is helping, if you send newsletters, reports, and other examples of what's happening in your school.



Fred Bay

Connecting Through Creativity

At Toll Gate High School, Maggie Boylan and Matt Hodge team-teach an interdisciplinary course, Boylan on English and Hodge handling a social studies component. The program has been a raging success for its target audience — what Boylan calls the "motivationally at risk."

By using a variety of texts, ranging from *Gilgamesh* to Shakespeare, and including hands-on experiences — students learn pottery and meet with an archeologist — the program truly has turned high risk into high promise.

Global issues ahead: art breaks down the barriers.

Interdisciplinary teaching was also a success at Oxbow High School in Vermont. Mary Chin and other teachers were concerned about preparing rural kids for the 21st century, so they decided to team-teach and focus on learning about different cultures through art forms. Chin related how her students were excited to learn about an African tradition in which children use puppets to comment on the behavior of adults. Oxbow students made their own puppets — Chin showed us two examples — to narrate African folk tales.

Milton Area Junior High School in Pennsylvania revamped its arts program with an interdisciplinary course. "Teachers and administrators got together and decided to mesh music, art, and technical education into one course," said principal Steve Bish. "We're not teaching different content, we just restructured the form."

By incorporating the three classes under a common theme — in this case, Colonial America — student attitudes and performance took a large leap forward. Bish said that this thematic unit had teachers and students "building barbecue pits in the back yard of the school, going to reenactments," and yes, even once in a while, singing.

Put students at the center.

Carol Cathey, a math teacher from Florida's Port St. Joe High School, says, "About 12 years ago, we began reengineering our teaching and learning in this district and moved from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach." The results speak for themselves. Port St. Joe — a blue-collar community on the Panhandle — has recently had the highest standardized test scores in Florida.

To give participants strategies they could take back to their own schools, Cathey, in the hands-on workshop "Testing One, Two, Three...," designed a bingo game based on the student-centered approach. As participants entered the breakout room, Cathey passed

Through networking, conference participants find ideas for developing innovative curricula, creating alternative assessment, and meeting state standards.

Carol Cathey

Shifting the focus of the learning process from the teacher to the learner: a simple switch in priorities with a huge payoff.

out green bingo cards and charged everyone to collaborate in filling in the squares. "Each square contains a strategy that Port St. Joe used to improve test scores. Find someone in the room who has tried a particular strategy and then mark your square."

Examples of strategies on the bingo card included: *enlist the entire faculty, change teaching from teacher to student centered, use alternative assessment methods.* Almost every participant had at least one strategy to share, which helped their colleagues fill in squares. Here are three examples:

- Gene Paul, director of elementary education in West Carrollton, Ohio, moved from teacher- to *student-centered* approaches with "A.I.M.S." — Action to Integrate Math and Science. Instead of listening to lectures all the time, West Carrollton students learn by doing.

- Georgia Beasley, coordinator of curriculum for the Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency, offered an *alternative assessment* approach through a new computer program that allows Northeast Georgia to assess curricular gaps. "You need to work with all grade levels, notice the gaps, and put that stuff into the staff development," says Beasley.

- Joan Van Valkenburg, director of guidance at Worcester Central School in upstate New York, *enlists the whole faculty*: "When we made test scores a priority and began curricular changes, we got all faculty on board. They're the most important resource you've got."

After someone shouted, "BINGO!," Cathey asked participants to turn over their cards. On the other side was a shape that identified one of seven groups to which participants were randomly assigned. Each group discussed strategies to improve teaching and learning in their schools, and they agreed on a team strategy to share with the entire workshop.

As the workshop drew to a close, Cathey said, "Today you have all just participated in student-centered learning. You've learned from each other. If we want to raise scores, we need to change the way our students learn, and that means altering pedagogy, assessment, and everything that happens in our classrooms."

Upon leaving the workshop, James Cournoyer, principal of Winooski Middle/High School in Vermont, remarked, "I wish we could bottle her energy and put it into the water supply."

Oregon Odyssey

Reedsport, Oregon, is a challenged Northwest salmon fishing and timber community, a town as endangered as the commodities that once sustained it. Now Reedsport is becoming a retirement community.

Yet Ike Launstein, superintendent of the 970-student Reedsport School District, spoke with enthusiasm about the future of the schools, supported by the community both with tax dollars and personal commitment. And, for the past two years, Reedsport has been a part of the Foundation for Excellent Schools PACE program funded by the International Paper Company Foundation.

"We have used FES in combination with Oregon's required Comprehensive District Improvement Plan. Our targets with FES are the same ones that we have with the state. We are focusing on academic achievement and parental involvement. These goals fit nicely with FES and the state. And, when we launched our significant commitment to technology this fall, Gary Turits (FES program director and director of occupational education at the Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES) was on hand to help launch the new program.

New needs foster new alliances.

"New partnerships have developed that have helped make things possible. For example, we had a partnership with the city that provided us with a school resource officer — a police officer — who talked to the classes and worked with students. But the grant money was ending. We wondered how we would continue...until the local hospital stepped forward and provided funds for the position."

When asked about the FES national conference, he reached for his notes and responded, "Where do I start...? This has been an unbelievable experience. From having lunch with the Secretary of Education to the opportunity to talk with other educators to sessions where you had to stop and say, 'Oh, that would fit right into what we are doing,' a lot of the discussion just helps you to refocus.

"I'm energized. I have a page of notes here and I am looking forward to my flight back when I will have lots of thinking time. I plan to pull out my notes and reflect on them.... I know you can't do everything, so you identify what is the top priority and what is next down the list and what the steps are to move forward with them. It's refocus time."

Ike Launstein and Mary Eirich

As a community changes its economic base, maintaining a commitment to its schools takes initiative and involvement.

You rub my back, and I'll rub yours....
An exercise in relaxation preceding one of the sessions.

Barnyard Connection — Big Apple Comes to the Green Mountains

"Paul spoke about the things that he does everyday, and in our classes we discuss these same ideas in total isolation. It will be so exciting for our kids to see that somebody uses this knowledge."

Teachers and principals from a half-dozen Alabama, Massachusetts, and New York schools spent the day before the conference with their colleagues at FES schools in Vermont. For the group from two New York City schools, the Vermont experience was one they could hardly stop talking about.

The visit connected the New Yorkers to Oxbow High School in the Northeast Kingdom, overseen by Vermont's principal of the year Robert Jones. While the visit has already sparked a student exchange program, the activity the night before — a visit to school board member Paul Knox's dairy farm — gave Winston McCarthy, assistant principal of Paul Robeson High School in Brooklyn, a megadose of adrenaline.

"We were really impressed at the depth of Paul Knox's knowledge and experience. He gave us a tour of the farm, showed us the various kinds of feeds, and discussed the nutritional balance that they have to maintain.... Running a dairy farm, the production of milk involves so many levels. Paul has to know science, understand reproduction and artificial insemination, and the issue of hormones for improving lactation. He has to know math, chemistry, biology, and physics. Paul spoke about the things that he does everyday, and in our classes we discuss these same ideas in total isolation. It will be so exciting for our kids to see that somebody uses this knowledge."

Students show they're in the know.

At Oxbow, the students drew McCarthy's attention. "My tour guide was a 12th grader named Ellie, and I was really impressed with her knowledge of school programs. When I asked her questions about pedagogy, such as the structure of supervision in the school, she gave me answers that amazed me...she was so aware. They must be doing something good that produces students that are so involved in what is going on in that school...students must be a very intimate part of the process.

"I was also struck by the way the labs were structured physically...as a science teacher, it was an ideal situation. Even though our rooms in New York City are not structured like that, I began thinking about how we could do these things with mobile units and some other changes we could make.

"I was fascinated with the small class sizes, but when I visited the science labs, I noted that they did not have a prep specialist to prepare materials for the teacher as we do."

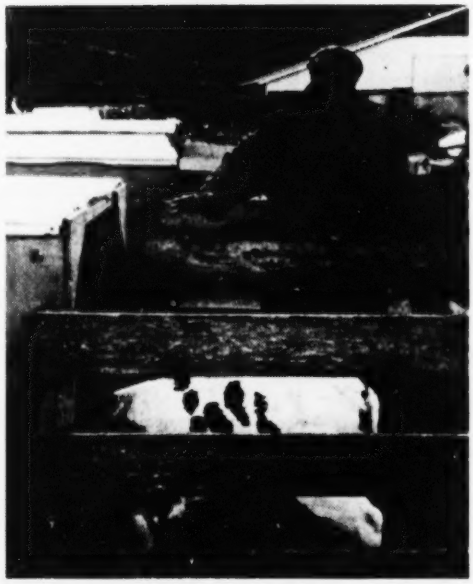
McCarthy's experience seemed to embody many FES core values, themes that resonated throughout the conference. Perhaps the most valuable partners of all are our colleagues from so many different settings. Through our diversity and difference we find not only common ground but strength.

Vera Streeter, Simone Grey, Ira Weston, and Winston McCarthy watch dairy farmer Paul Knox prepare to artificially inseminate a dairy cow.

Provide students with real-life learning experiences.

As McCarthy left the Stoweflake, our conference headquarters, on Saturday afternoon, he spoke about bringing his students to the barn in Bradford, Vermont. He was dreaming of ways to introduce his science students to the farm, the farmer, and the concept of *learning within context.* "Can you imagine bringing our kids into the barn. I can't wait! That kind of learning is so important and rich...being there and seeing things in that context. My students will be as excited as we were."

Mary Chin of Oxbow was beaming when she talked about her students visiting Brooklyn next spring: "They'll see a world they've never seen before."



Winston McCarthy greets a day-old calf.

Schools helping schools — networking and sharing among colleagues — is central to the FES experience.

Paul Knox explains to Simone Grey that stale bread from Albany is used as cattle feed.

Ira Weston tries his hand at feeding the calf.

"In less than a decade, FES has left its positive imprint in schools across the nation. By helping schools and communities collaboratively design plans to achieve educational excellence, their efforts are producing results — the kind to share and replicate."

— James M. Jeffords
U. S. Senator, State of Vermont

James M. Jeffords

Clearly, the FES conference is just the beginning. Not only are 320 of us taking one more step as we recommit and take back new practices and support networks; most important, we are helping the young people in our schools take one more step. The beneficiaries will be our students and our communities.

The conference will have an impact on Winston McCarthy's, Mary Chin's, John McDonald's, Carol Cathey's, and Ike Launstein's students and those of 300 more participants. What we take away from the conference will make a major difference in our work. What we learn from each other makes us better teachers, better administrators, better leaders and team players. Ultimately the winners are thousands of young people throughout the country; for them our commitment translates into more and better opportunities.

Mission

Foundation for Excellent Schools (FES) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening schools and communities through programs that catalyze the improvement process. Committed to providing opportunities for all students to succeed in school and beyond and believing that any school desiring change can achieve it, FES empowers students, schools, and communities to take "one more step" toward a successful future.

Process

FES emphasizes the vital link between a school and its community when it helps a school develop and implement a locally conceived, practical plan. Our work nationwide has shown that schools are integral to and defined by their community context.

Because each school serves a distinct community and faces its own challenges, the plan must be tailored to the school's individual needs, resources, and obstacles. There is no "one size fits all" improvement plan; however, years of experience have shown us that schools move toward excellence when they:

Build Capacity
Planning, team building, visioning, and assessment are essential for any organization. FES helps schools and communities develop and strengthen practices that build these capacities for lasting improvement.

Collaborate
Students have more opportunities when their schools collaborate with communities, colleges, businesses, and social service agencies. FES helps schools form partnerships with these outside resources.

Network
When educators and community members exchange ideas, the potential for innovation is unlimited. Through a Web site, newsletter, and annual conference, FES enables its national network of schools and communities to share successful practices and to support one another in the improvement process.

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